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Reflections on Macrometonymy

Theory of Macrometonymy

Metonymy, which has been discussed as a language phenomenon since antiquity, is now attracting the interest of numerous scholars, especially those working in the field of rhetoric and cognitive linguistics. The present considerations belong to widely understood rhetoric, where our point of departure will be the traditional definition of metonymy, but our main focus will be on some of the more complex and subtle ways in which metonymic mechanisms may manifest themselves in discourse.

As indicated in the title, for the needs of the following considerations we adopt a macrotropic view of metonymy. The need for a systematic division of semantic stylistic figures into micro- and macrotropes has been postulated by Chrzanowska-Kluczewska (2003) and the criterion which lies at the basis of this distinction is the scope of a given rhetorical device: the term "microtropes" (or "small tropes") covers those that operate within the functional domain of a phrase up to a sentence, whereas the range of "macrotropes" goes beyond one sentence.

In this approach, metonymy in its traditional understanding is located among microtropes, that is tropes of restricted scope. Let us recollect that according to its traditional definition, metonymy consists in substituting a word or phrase with an expression that is to function as its semantic equivalent, and the semantic relationship which motivates the substitution is that of contiguity.

Contiguity when considered in terms of a relationship between the referents of two linguistic expressions may consist in:

- physical proximity
- temporal co-occurrence
- cause-effect relationships
- relationships of possession
- *pars-totum* relationships
- relationships between origin/source/producer and product
- object-function relationships
- material-object relationships
- relationships between the abstract and the concrete.

Contiguity understood in terms of sense relations may be described as:

- part-whole lexical relations (meronymy)
- relationships between hyponyms and hyperonyms (class inclusion)
- relationships of alienable and inalienable possession.

Pars-totum relationships, class inclusion and relations of inalienable possession are characteristic of synecdoche, which we will treat as a subtype of metonymy. As special cases of synecdochic relationships we should mention these between the singular and the plural, as well as between definite and indefinite numbers.

Two remarks have to be made here. The first is that the list of contiguity relations presented above is by no means an exhaustive one. Secondly, the "relationship between the abstract and the concrete" needs further clarification, especially as this type of link appears to be typical rather of symbol or metaphor. As regards metonymy, this kind of relationship must always be supported by other kinds of contiguity, which is to say it is never an autonomous link. Let us consider the following example, coming from an article dealing with health services:

(1) Many people remain locked up longer than necessary because *beds* cannot be found for them outside high-security hospitals. (Goodchild 2003)

Beds stand here for treatment and care, so we may classify this example as an instance of a substitution of the concrete for the abstract. Still, the exact nature of the motivating contiguity is complex and consists in a fusion of the object-function relationship (*beds* need to be associated with the function they have in the context of hospital treatment), *pars-totum* relations (a bed being only one of the items necessary for hospital care), as well as physical proximity (between a hospital bed and other objects associated with treatment, including the whole hospital building).

Let us now consider an example of the opposite kind of substitution, that is the abstract for the concrete.

(2) Nobody is born to be a *failure*. (Ernsberger 1997)

The basic contiguity relations that underlie this metonymic substitution include first of all the cause-effect relationship between the actions undertaken by a person and their outcome, and secondly the link between the activities performed and the person who performs them.

The final remark that will summarise our brief discussion of micrometonymy is that metonymy as a small trope can be traced back to Quintilian's substitution theory of figures. The macrotropic view of metonymy is, in turn, inspired directly by Jakobson's findings (1956). When analysing the mechanisms underlying the semantic development of discourse, Jakobson identifies two ways in which it may proceed: one of them involves linking topics by similarity and is called metaphoric, whereas the other relies on links of contiguity and is described by Jakobson as metonymic. He has in mind certain general tendencies concerning the ways in which texts can be organized. This includes their composition at a level higher than a sentence. According to Jakobson, poetry tends to exploit similarity relationships, whereas prose is primarily metonymic, also in its tendency to focus on selected detail when representing wholes. In the field of literary study Jakobson's follower is David Lodge (1977).

Not everything that Jakobson says can be accepted as a basis for a theory of macrometonymy: his view of the metaphoric and the metonymic in texts is so broad as to assign to metaphor and metonymy the status of the ruling principles of discourse in general. This is the point where macrotropes merge into huge figures, i.e. metatropes (on

metatropes see Chrzanowska-Kluczewska 2003). Extensive research is still needed to establish how useful Jakobson's findings are from the point of view of the theory of macrotropes. What is of seminal importance for us here is that he ascribes a metonymic quality to certain modes of presentation regardless of whether they do or do not rely on metonymy as a microtrope, as well as the fact that he identifies the metonymic principle behind a fragmentary and detail-oriented description.

In order to better understand Jakobson's idea of metonymic imagery it is good to bear in mind what he says about a mode of expression different than the one with which we are primarily concerned here, namely about the cinema. The cinema relies on metonymy as a strategy of transforming objects into signs by means of close-ups and detail selection: the camera may focus on particular fragments of objects and these fragmentary presentations function as signs of the objects thus presented. In addition to this, the cinema exploits synecdochic mechanisms when separating the sound from its source: speech may be heard when the speaker has already ceased to be visible, or a source of sound may appear with the sound inaudible.

The above strategies may be said to have their equivalents in prose, and this applies not only to the selective use of details, but to some extent to the separation of the sound from its source as well. Let us consider the following example from F.S. Fitzgerald's *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz* (1996: 54).

(3) "Warren" – a soft voice at his elbow broke in upon his thoughts, and he turned to see Marjorie, flushed and radiant as usual.

In the above scene the sound becomes temporarily separated from its source as the woman is speaking but is not yet "visible." This strategy serves here as an indicator of a particular point of view, namely Warren's, and it has been employed in order to signal indirectly that at the moment when Marjorie began to speak he was looking away.

As we have already pointed out, macrometonymy operates at a different level than micrometonymy and may occur independently of the latter. However, as it has been observed by Chrzanowska-Kluczewska, a macrometonymic string of discourse may, in fact, take a form of a sequence of metonymic expressions of a smaller scope. The question

which arises at this point concerns the metonymic status of these building blocks as well as their mutual relationships. A separate question, which is perhaps the first and the most basic one we should ask, is whether every sequence of this kind becomes a macrotrope.

One final remark before we proceed to the analysis of particular examples will concern the scope of macrometonymy. As it will soon become clear, in the case of metonymy what distinguishes a macrotrope from a microtrope is the *potential* of the former to organise stretches of discourse longer than one sentence. This is to mean that this potential is not always actualized, and secondly that macrometonymy is in its very nature an open trope, i.e. its particular instantiations often have an inherent capability of being expanded or reduced.

Metonymic Sequences

The first example we are going to consider comes from Philip Larkin's poem "The Old Fools":

(4) Their looks show that they are for it:
Ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines –
How can they ignore it?

What we observe in the above excerpt is a metonymic description of old people's appearance. Its elements: *ash hair, toad hands, prune face dried into lines* can be easily combined to give a unified image whose character is evidently synecdochic – we have no vision of the whole but only of selected details. The reason for the selection of these particular details is that they are considered to be symptomatic of the process of ageing perceived as bodily decay. This means that the macrotrope as a whole is based on two metonymic mechanisms: *pars pro toto* and "symptom for condition" (or "result for cause").

Let us now devote some attention to the analysis of the elements that constitute the macrotropic sequence. The question that needs to be answered is whether they have an individual metonymic quality apart from being part of the macrotrope. They cannot be classified as small tropes: none of them is a result of a microtropic substitution, which is to say

that the expressions have retained their reference to the particular bodily parts they name. If they can still be said to carry a metonymic value independently of the macrotrope they contribute to, it is by virtue of the fact that each of them is individually implicative of the whole whose part it names, that is it exhibits a metonymic potential at a macrotropic level. When the elements are considered as one trope, this individual potential becomes highly redundant so that there is no need for a preliminary independent metonymic interpretation of the building blocks of the sequence.

In other words, each of the expressions yields an image that is a part of the puzzle. Because of being incomplete, it shows readiness for a macrotropic fusion with other elements which are potentially implicative of the same whole. Together they evoke a fragmentary image which calls for a metonymic interpretation.

Similar mechanisms can be observed in the following excerpt from *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane (1994: 41):

(5) There was an appalling imprint upon these faces. The struggle in the smoke had pictured an exaggeration of itself on the bleached cheeks and in the eyes wild with one desire.

This depiction of the retreating soldiers is an example of what Jakobson would call a detail-oriented description in prose. Again, the elements of the description can be easily combined to yield a unified and at the same time fragmentary image, and again, their individual metonymic potential does not have to be actualized as this would result in redundancy. The metonymic mechanisms which underlie the whole presentation are not only *pars pro toto*, but also symptom for condition: the soldiers' emotions are conveyed by describing their appearance rather than being named directly.

The next two examples will come from Larkin's poetry again:

(6) Bead-stalls, balloon-men, a Bank; a beer-marquee that
Half-screens a canvas Gents; a tent selling tweed,
And another, jackets.

This excerpt, coming from "Show Saturday," is an instance of a description that is synecdochic to such a degree that it consists in enu-

merating selected details which gradually add up to make up the scene. When we consider the building blocks constituting the macrometonymy, the first thing to be observed is that as parts of the macrotrope they are tied together by what Jakobson would call a spatial contiguity rather than by a *pars-totum* relation proper. In other words, each of them names an object that is an integral and self-contained whole in itself and therefore their individual metonymic quality is much weaker than in the case of the building blocks in the previous two examples. As the parts of the overall image of the show are not incomplete in an obvious physical or functional sense, the elements of the description exhibit a reduced propensity for a macrotropic fusion and the macrotrope is less tightly-knit than in the examples previously discussed.

To conclude at this point would mean, however, to overlook a very important fact, namely that two of the elements of the above sequence have, in fact, a very strong metonymic status, so strong as to require an independent metonymic interpretation apart from being combined with the remaining ones. In "*a tent selling tweed/ and another, jackets*" *a tent* is itself a result of a metonymic substitution and refers to "people working in a tent," so we are dealing here with an instance of a micrometonymic shift of reference, whereas the final part of the sequence is an elliptical version of *and another tent, selling jackets*; where *another [tent]* needs to be interpreted according to the same micrometonymic principle.

Our next excerpt comes from Larkin's poem entitled "At Grass":

(7) The eye can hardly pick them out
From the cold shade they shelter in,
Till wind distresses tail and mane;
Then one crops grass, and moves about
The other seeming to look on –
And stands anonymous again.

The fragmentary nature of this description may be said to suggest that the animals remain in the shade apart from certain parts of their bodies. What we are allowed to see clearly is only those parts which are blown by the wind. The details mentioned direct our thoughts to horses as the subject of the description. We could also think of lions, though it would be hard to imagine their tails being "distressed by the wind." Con-

clusive information can be found in the next line, containing the image of one of the animals eating grass.

Coming back to the building blocks of the description, we can observe here a typical example of a synecdochic use of the singular for the plural: the context indicates clearly that the expressions *tail* and *mane* used in the singular have, actually, plural reference. Detecting the micrometonymic value of the two expressions leads to the multiplication of the details which become the building blocks of the macrometonymy.

There is one more instance of micrometonymy in the above excerpt, namely *the eye*, which is used here synecdochically for anyone that might be looking. This phrase, however, is not an element of the description as such and therefore it does not add to the complexity of the macrotrope.

An observation similar to the one just made results from the analysis of the first two lines of "Nurse's Song" by William Blake:

(8) When the voices of children are heard on the green,
And laughing is heard on the hill,

We are dealing here with a mechanism that resembles Jakobson's cinematic synecdoche: the activities of the children are described only in terms of sounds, which is to say that the presentation is governed by a sound-oriented macrometonymy. The building blocks of the macrotrope name what can be heard, that is *the voices of children* and *laughing*, and are bound together by temporal contiguity and by coming from one source. Neither of them requires an independent metonymic interpretation. It is worth pointing out that in the two lines quoted above we can observe a micrometonymic use of *the green* as a feature being named instead of an object, but, similarly as *the eye* in the previous example, it does not belong to the macrotrope analysed.

Larkin's poem "Spring" contains a synecdochic portrayal of the season of the year mentioned in the title:

(9) Calmly a cloud stands, calmly a bird sings,
And, flashing like a dangled looking-glass,
Sun lights the balls that bounce, the dogs that bark,
The branch-arrested mist of leaf, and me.

The elements that add up to give the detail-oriented image of spring are linked by co-occurrence. One of them certainly requires an independent metonymic interpretation: *leaf* can be seen either as a use of the singular for the plural, or object for substance. In addition to this, *a cloud* and *a bird* may be considered as instances of the singular for the plural, but there is no clear indication of their plural reference.

Our next example will come from F.S. Fitzgerald's short story "Bernice Bobs her Hair" (1996: 52):

(10) principals and chorus are represented by the medley of faces and voices that sway to the plaintive African rhythm of Dyer's dance orchestra.

The two-element sequence (*faces* and *voices*) constitutes a synecdochic description of a group of people swaying to the music. Neither of the elements calls for an independent metonymic interpretation.

Let us now look at the following sentence:

(11) The stage in our city will need new faces and wise heads in order to survive.

What we have here is a sequence of metonymic expressions each of which requires an autonomous metonymic interpretation: *the stage* stands for "the theatre" as an institution, whereas *new faces* and *wise heads* for "new people" and "wise people," respectively. Each of them is itself a case of *pars pro toto* and each of them stands for a different whole at a microtropic level, so they have a fully realized independent metonymic value. However, this is the point where the metonymic processes involved in the interpretation of this sentence are complete: the elements are not part of a description and there is in fact no possibility of their being combined to evoke a unified metonymic image, which means that they do not interact at the macrotropic level.

Conclusions

We have looked at some examples of macrometonymy based on metonymic sequences. Let us now recollect the questions that we posed in the introduction. One of them was whether every sequence of

metonymic expressions formed a macrotrope. The answer, predictably, is no: two or more metonymic expressions may appear in what we might call a seeming sequence or chain, with no interaction at the macrotropic level (cf. example (11)).

The second question concerned the status of the building blocks of macrometonymy. We have seen examples where the elements of a sequence exhibited an individual metonymic potential at the macrotropic level only and there was no need for its independent realization (cf. examples (4), (5), (8), (10)).

However, there were also instances where some of the building blocks in a sequence had a strengthened individual metonymic status by virtue of being additionally microtropes, which influenced the overall interpretation of the macrotrope (cf. examples (6), (7), (9)).

To sum up, we have distinguished the following patterns:

1) a mere coexistence of metonymic expressions, each of which requires an independent metonymic interpretation with no tendency for being combined to evoke a unified metonymic image (thus no macrometonymy is constructed);

2) a sequence of expressions which have a partly metonymic status, i.e. which do not require independent metonymic interpretation, and which together evoke a unified metonymic image (we may call this pattern a "simple macrometonymy");

3) a sequence of expressions of which at least one calls for an independent metonymic interpretation in addition to being combined with the remaining elements of the sequence to evoke a unified metonymic image (we can suggest the term "complex macrometonymy" to describe the above pattern).

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